



Environmental Assistance Visits

Departmental fact sheet

8/2007

Environmental assistance visits help citizens and facilities understand requirements of their environmental permits.

Environmental assistance visits became standard practice in January 2006 for the Department of Natural Resources. Through June 2007, staff have conducted more than 4,300 environmental assistance visits. Staff from the department visited land disturbance sites, newly permitted air sources, drinking water facilities where permit actions are anticipated, limestone quarries and hazardous waste generators. The department walked permittees through their unique permit requirements and provided compliance assistance rather than conducting formal inspections.

In a survey of businesses conducted by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, nearly 99 percent of respondents reported that they felt well served by staff from the department who visited their operations as part of environmental assistance visits.

About 82 percent of the new permit holders completed a survey. New permit holders were asked to rate the department's assistance on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being best) on how helpful the staff visits were in helping to understand the permit. The department received an overall rating of approximately 92 percent. Respondents said they found the visits to be very informative and proactive and that they helped to reinforce good practices already being implemented at the facilities.

In instances where no survey was returned, the department's ombudsmen followed up directly with facilities, which helped ensure more responses were received. The Department of Natural Resources will continue to survey facilities regarding their experiences with environmental assistance visits and department service. As concerns with communication, professionalism or training are identified, the agency will address each of them to improve its effectiveness.

Environmental assistance visits are a new component of the department's compliance assistance efforts, which are designed to help businesses, communities and citizens protect the environment by preventing spills, leaks and other hazards from occurring. Because the visits are not formal inspections, compliance assistance is provided with the expectation that corrections will be made if the department discovers any problems. However, the department will initiate formal enforcement actions if violations of a very serious nature are found. Very serious violations are those that are immediately or imminently harmful to human health or the environment, such as a hazardous waste release.

Detailed information about the department's procedures for environmental assistance visits is available in its Field Services Division Operations Manual, which is available online at www.dnr.mo.gov/services/opsmanual.htm.